Delivering Technology Access to America's Communities
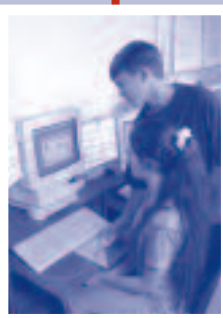
About Neighborhood Networks

What Is the Neighborhood Networks Initiative?

Neighborhood Networks, a HUD community-based initiative, encourages the development of community technology centers in HUD in-sured and assisted housing. Launched by HUD in 1995, Neighborhood Networks was one of the first federal initiatives to promote comput-er access and self-sufficiency in low-income communities.

Today more than 1,200 Neighborhood Net-works centers in urban and rural communities across the country are bringing the power of technology to low-income households. Work-force development programs at Neighborhood Networks centers are helping adults advance their education, pursue new employment opportunities, and move toward economic self-sufficiency. Neighborhood Networks afterschool programs are providing tutoring and educational enrichment, recreation, and mentoring for children. Additionally, residents of all ages, from infants to senior citizens, may receive onsite healthcare screening and other services at their local Neighborhood Networks center.

Neighborhood Networks Fills a Growing Need

The U.S. Department of Commerce report, *A Nation Online* (February 2002), examined trends in access to information. Throughout the country, computer use and Internet access have increased substantially in the past few years. By September 2001, more than 65 per-cent of Americans were using computers and 54 percent had access to the Internet.

However, certain demographic groups—low-income families, poorly educated adults, unemployed people, minorities, and residents of rural areas—lag behind other Americans in both computer use and Internet access.

The Department of Commerce also reports that:

✦ Each year, being digitally connected becomes more critical to economic and educational advancement.

✦ Digital access also increases and enhances community participation.

✦ For low-income households, cost remains the primary reason for not connecting to the Internet.

By encouraging the creation of Neighborhood Networks centers in multifamily housing prop-erties, HUD is working to ensure that resi-dents have access to information technology and economic opportunities. Neighborhood Networks centers are helping Americans—regardless of age, income, race, ethnicity, disability, or geography—gain access to 21st-century tools and skills.

What Are Neighborhood Networks Centers Like?

No two Neighborhood Networks centers are alike. Typically, a center includes one room or a series of spaces equipped with computers located onsite or near a HUD insured and assisted housing community. Residents, prop-erty owners, and managers establish local centers and tailor their programs to the community's needs.

With support from local, innovative public-private partnerships, a typical Neighborhood Networks center provides residents with computer and Internet access, staff assistance, and a program menu that may include the following:

- Computer skills.

- Lifelong learning for adults, such as English as a second language or online educational courses.

- Workforce development programs.

- Youth programs, including afterschool and summer activities.

- Financial literacy and home-buying classes.

- Microenterprise development.

- Health and social services.

How Do Those Who Participate Benefit From Neighborhood Networks?

Here are some documented benefits:

- Residents gain access to onsite programs that improve job skills, expand lifelong learning, and help families move toward self-sufficiency.

- Neighborhood Networks afterschool programs enrich and extend the schoolday and also provide adult supervision for children.

- Property owners report that Neighborhood Networks centers make their apartments more competitive, lower vacancy rates, help stabilize tenancy, reduce crime, and improve community cohesiveness and pride.

- Local and national partners of Neighborhood Networks centers gain access to new constituencies—businesses to prospective employees and customers, colleges to new students, and social services agencies to new clients. Also, through Neighborhood Networks initiatives, banks are meeting Community Reinvestment Act obligations.

- Nationwide, Neighborhood Networks centers are making communities safer, expanding education and employment opportunities, and creating more vibrant, connected, and self-sufficient populations.

What Is HUD's Role?

HUD encourages the creation and growth of Neighborhood Networks centers by guiding property owners and managers and center staff through the center development process. In 2003 HUD provided Neighborhood Network centers with the Strategic Tracking And Reporting Tool (START), a new and improved online tool to help Neighborhood Networks centers develop business plans and report and track their programs. HUD also provides technical assistance on various topics, such as partnership building, fundraising, and grant writing.

To become self-sustaining, Neighborhood Networks centers develop partnerships with local and national businesses, nonprofit groups, government agencies, social service providers, educational and health institutions, faith-based groups, civic organizations, and foundations.

How Can I Help?

For information about starting a center, partnering with a center, or volunteering at a center, contact your local HUD Neighborhood Networks Coordinator. To find the coordinator in your area, go to the Neighborhood Networks Web site: *www.NeighborhoodNetworks.org*. Click on "Resources for centers" and then click on "Neighborhood Networks Coordinator."

For more information, contact:

U.S. Department of Housing and
    Urban Development
Neighborhood Networks Information Center
2277 Research Boulevard, 5J
Rockville, MD 20850

(888) 312–2743 (toll free)
TTY: (800) 483–2209

Web site: *www.NeighborhoodNetworks.org*
E-mail: *NeighborhoodNetworks@hud.gov*

EQUAL HOUSING
OPPORTUNITY